
AP[®] English Language and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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Free-Response Question 3

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Argument Essay

6 points

Colin Powell, a four-star general and former United States secretary of state, wrote in his 1995 autobiography: “[W]e do not have the luxury of collecting information indefinitely. At some point, before we can have every possible fact in hand, we have to decide. The key is not to make quick decisions, but to make timely decisions.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Powell’s claim about making decisions is valid.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
- Provide evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis (0–1 points)	0 points For any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no defensible thesis. The intended thesis only restates the prompt. The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. 	1 point Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only restate the prompt. Do not take a position, or the position is vague or must be inferred. State an obvious fact rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to the prompt by taking a position on the extent to which Powell’s claim about making decisions is valid, rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt. Clearly take a position rather than just stating that there are pros/cons.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Do not take a position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Life is full of decisions, and everyone must make decisions at one time or another.”</i> Address the topic of the prompt but are not defensible—it is an obvious fact stated as a claim <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Before making a decision, it is best to weigh all the pros and cons and examine all the factors that go into that decision.”</i> 	Examples that earn this point: Present a defensible position that responds to the prompt. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“As Secretary Powell argues, the key to making decisions is not to make them quickly, but to make them at the right time.”</i> <i>“While it is best to have all the relevant information in hand before making a decision, at some point or another, waiting too long to make the decision can be as bad as making it too quickly.”</i> <i>“It’s easy enough to say that making timely decisions is important. The difficult part—as Hamlet well knows—is trying to figure out exactly <u>when</u> to make that critical decision.”</i>
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. The thesis may be anywhere within the response. The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point. A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0–4 points)	0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the argument.	2 points EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.	3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.	4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	Typical responses that earn 0 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. May be just opinion with no evidence or evidence that is irrelevant. 	Typical responses that earn 1 point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to focus on summary of evidence rather than specific details. 	Typical responses that earn 2 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument. May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. 	Typical responses that earn 3 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific details to build an argument. Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims. Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim. 	Typical responses that earn 4 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific details to build an argument. Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained.
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. 					

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize their argument, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (<i>“In a world where . . .”</i> OR <i>“Since the beginning of time . . .”</i>). Only hint at or suggest other arguments (<i>“While some may argue that . . .”</i> OR <i>“Some people say . . .”</i>). Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the argument. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions. Articulating the implications or limitations of an argument (either the student’s argument or an argument related to the prompt) by situating it within a broader context. Making effective rhetorical choices that consistently strengthen the force and impact of the student’s argument. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
	Additional Notes: This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference.	

Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

We live in a world of demand. We are bombarded with advertisements, information, and opinions - the pressure to 'buy this now' or 'decide this now' is ever-present and always increasing. In a world of instant gratification, it is important to not only make decisions, but make quality decisions that are independent of what may be popular opinion, because the consequence of a quick decision may be costly.

I just became an adult, and now I'm faced with a plethora of decisions about college, finances, and my future career. Every day, I am reminded of the decisions I have to make and the deadlines I have to decide by. It gets overwhelming. When I was in the process of choosing where I wanted to go to college, there were some people around me that were making decisions within weeks. They would find a college, tour it, think about it for a few weeks, and then, bam, they knew. Some people I knew did that with their career, as well. Those same people would sit with their decisions for a few months, and then the doubts would start to roll in. "What if I made the wrong choice?" The question loomed around in their minds until they shook it away. Or, for some would change the decision that they thought was perfect for them. This was not my case. It took me months, almost a full year, to decide where I wanted to go. I compiled all the information I could, and I would often feel overwhelmed, ~~but not~~ and even more so like I was the only person still deciding, but in the end, once I made my decision, I was sure of it. I had no doubts. Quality decisions are important. It may be easy to make decisions on the spot and take

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Information right as it comes and base your decisions on that information, but in my experience, waiting despite the pressure pays off. That way, you are sure of your decision and you know it was based on your true desire and not ~~the~~ a passing wish.

Making decisions that are independent of popular opinion is valuable as well. ~~So~~ Personally, I have found this to be true with my political views. I was raised a conservative, but ~~my~~ a large portion of my peers were liberal. As I grew and learned more about what each side entailed, I ~~to become~~ formed my own opinions. My peers had a large influence on me, and so did ~~the~~ media, but I remained independent and sure of my conservative views. Some people will assimilate to the views that those around them have, and that results in a poor foundation that is easily swayed by the fluctuating opinions ~~to~~ of that community. When someone, like me, spends time forming their own opinions apart from others, the result is a solid view point that will not be affected by the present climate or outside opinions.

~~For~~ If a decision is made hastily, though, the cost may be high. ~~Back to the example of~~ Changing your major or transferring schools isn't too difficult, and though there may be disappointment, the cost is not high in the long run. On the other hand, making a hasty decision about a place to live, who to live with, or how to live life ^{may} come with a cost. These things are coming up in the future. ~~I will have to~~ Will I choose to stay and live in the state I live right now? Thought is required to make that

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decision, and if I make it too quickly, I might end up missing out on a great job opportunity or cheaper living costs. If I choose to live with someone I've only known for a few months, they may turn out to be a whole different person that I can't just walk out on. Paying bills, cooking inside or eating out, or vacations might be spur of the moment decisions, but ~~the~~ ~~choice~~ in making bad habits out of them will come back and bite me in the future.

In a world of demand and instant gratification, it is important not only to make decisions, but make quality decisions that are independent of what may be popular opinion, because the consequences of a quick decision may be costly.

Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

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Colin Powell wrote in his autobiography that ~~the~~ timely decisions are more important than quick decisions. ~~There will~~ He argues that decisions that are made should not be rushed, but ~~should be~~ decisions that have ~~on~~ ~~with~~ ~~you~~ fulfill ~~the~~ maximize efficiency. I agree with his claim because ~~this can be~~ this of effectiveness of making timely decisions ~~is exhibited in~~ ~~the handling of~~ & ineffectiveness of quick decisions is exhibited in the ~~government~~ US's handling of the COVID-19 Pandemic, ~~the~~ tapering of the Fed & increase of interest rates recently.

When the US knew about the existence of COVID-19, the government ~~did not~~ had to make many decisions with ~~the~~ ~~time~~ the country. Many of these decisions had to be made really quickly. ~~As~~ A crucial decision they had to make was whether or not to implement ~~a~~ ^{vaccine distribution} ~~a mask~~ ^{mandates}. ~~When~~ ~~the~~ In its early stages, COVID was having detrimental effects on people's health. The vaccine was still in trial & ~~not~~ ~~completely~~ approved yet. Genevieve Allard, ~~a teacher at Bergen Tech~~ a teacher at a high school in NJ, had to make a timely decision when her son ~~was~~ fell violently ill from COVID & ~~had~~ ~~pleaded~~ ~~the~~ had the preliminary doses of the vaccine given to her son. If she had not made the decision to give him the vaccine, his recovery

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Question 3



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could be further ~~the~~ reduced. The decision was timely & thus it ~~saved~~ ~~to~~ saved him.

~~The~~ After the econo During Covid. the economy needed tremendous amounts of support as consumption began to decrease and businesses began to shut down. ~~The government~~ Consequently, the government passed a stimulus bill that benefitted the economy & allowed it to recover. ~~Thus~~ The recovery of the economy was accelerated by the vaccine efficiency. ~~However~~ ~~the~~ ~~Some~~ ~~enough~~ ~~the~~ a few months later the Fed announced that they would begin to taper the economy & lead busy America off of its crutches ~~for~~ ~~far~~. However, they did not taper early enough even though they made that decision, so the economy started experiencing inflation.

Which the government is still trying to ameliorate today. This delayed reaction partly

~~Furthermore~~ ~~the~~ ~~government~~ ~~wanted~~ ~~to~~ ~~raise~~ ~~into~~

Contributed to the inflation Americans are facing today.

~~Another~~ In order to remedy the rampant inflation America was facing, the ~~government~~ ~~proposed~~ Federal bank ~~also~~ announced that they would raise interest rates. However,

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Question 1

Question 2

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when they did it was not merely enough as the of inflation continued to rise. This may either have been because they did not decide to raise it by ~~0.5%~~ 50 basis points, or they raised interest rates too late. This emphasizes the importance of making timely decisions & not quick decisions.

Quick decisions can be impulsive & carry a lot of risk. They may be effective in certain cases, but they should not be prioritized instead. Timely decisions should be made because it is important to time a situation just right in order to maximize the probability that a desired consequence take place.

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Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Colin Powell, who was a four star general and a former United States Secretary of State. He wrote an autobiography and had made a claim about making decisions. In my personal opinion, Powell's claim is true to full extent and shows an extremely valuable piece of advice that we do not consider when we make decisions.

Powell stated, "before we ~~here~~ can have every possible fact in hand, we have to decide.... but to make it a timely decision (1995). With this statement Powell is telling the audience of his autobiography that it does not necessarily matter how many facts you have, and how many things you know. Being able to have access to everything possible takes a great amount of time and we don't always have all of the time in the world. A decision has to be made with what you know, waiting for something else to come in while trying to make a ~~decision~~ decision whether that other fact is good or bad you already have a good amount of things that you know. Everyone's time is valuable, including yours. ~~The~~ At the end of the day the decision will have to be made and that is why it should be made in a "timely" ~~mean~~ manner.

Question 3

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

Students responding to this question were expected to read a quote about making decisions from a 1995 autobiography by Colin Powell and then write an essay that argued their position on the extent to which Powell’s claim about making decisions is valid. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that takes a defensible position; provide evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supports their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description, (CLE-1.0, REO 1.0, STL-1.R), students were expected to be able to select evidence to develop and refine their claims, use appropriate approaches of organization and reasoning to support their argument, and make stylistic choices that advance that argument.

Sample: 3A

Score: 1-4-1

Thesis (0–1) points: 1

The thesis takes a nuanced position in paragraph 1 on the extent to which Powell’s claim about making decisions is valid, rather than simply restating it or simply agreeing with it: “It is important to not only make decisions, but make quality decisions that are independent of what may be popular opinion, because the consequence of a quick decision may be costly.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The response uses relevant details about the life choices and political views of the student and the student’s acquaintances to establish evidence and build a line of reasoning in support of a nuanced argument about the pressures to make hasty decisions and the consequences of doing so. The examples of college, finances, and career are all relevant to the argument and effectively situate the reasoning within personal anecdotes and scenarios. The response organizes and supports an argument composed of multiple supporting claims exploring the differences in stakes between different kinds of decisions and the pressures that can motivate rushed decisions. Each point is clearly explained using sufficient evidence from the student’s experiences and observations with full and persuasive commentary, as in “When someone like me spends time forming their own opinions apart from others, the result is a solid view point that will not be affected by the present climate or outside opinions.”

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response situates the prompt within a broader context of examples that are pressing for students as they move toward their first decisions as adults. The response places these timely decisions for students within a culture that prefers and even demands immediate gratification and thus shows a more complex understanding of the rhetorical situation, ultimately asserting that “[i]n a world of demand and instant gratification, it is important not only to make decisions, but make quality decisions that are independent of what may be popular opinion, because the consequence of a quick decision may be costly.” Noting the consequences of hasty decisions or decisions made to go along with popular opinion is a more nuanced and sophisticated argument that requires effective examples

Question 3 (continued)

and explanation to support. The style is not particularly vivid or persuasive, often marked by successive simple sentences and minor grammatical errors. These errors do not hinder understanding, but it is the nuanced argument that earned the Row C point here.

Sample: 3B

Score: 1-3-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The defensible thesis is found in paragraph 1: “I agree with his claim because the effectiveness of making timely decisions & ineffectiveness of quick decisions is exhibited in the US’s handling of the COVID-19 Pandemic, tapering of the Fed & increase of interest rates recently.” Although the response does not fully demonstrate an understanding of what “timely” means, this should not be held against the response or factor into the scoring of it, as long as the student’s interpretation or use of the word “timely” in the response is clear.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response uses discussions of reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic and decisions about economic turbulence to provide evidence for its argument about making decisions in an appropriate time span. It develops a line of reasoning in which all examples contribute to an argument about the need to act before it is too late. The response provides specific details with each example that relate to making timely decisions, for example those of the NJ high school teacher (“If she had not made the decision to give [her son] the vaccine, his recovery could be further reduced”), the stimulus bill (“the government passed a stimulus bill that benefitted the economy & allowed it to recover”), and the Central Bank (“This may either have been because they did not decide to raise it by 50 basis points, or they raised interest rates too late”). These details and commentary build the argument and support the response’s line of reasoning. Despite the consistent evidence throughout, there is an inconsistency and superficiality of commentary which prevented the response from earning the full 4 points in Row B.

Sophistication (0–1): 0

The response does not demonstrate success at incorporating sophistication of thought or of written expression, instead taking a structured yet simplistic stance on decision-making. There is not a consistently vivid and/or persuasive style, and the response does not examine a broader context or make a forceful argument.

Sample: 3C

Score: 1-1-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response earned the thesis point for the final sentence of paragraph 1: “In my personal opinion, Powells claim is true to full extent and shows an extremely valuable piece of advice that we do not consider when we make decisions.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

The response summarizes Powell’s claim and provides generalizations that circle back to Powell’s claim. For example, in paragraph 2, the student states: “Powell is telling the audience of his

Question 3 (continued)

autobiography that it does not necessarily matter how many facts you have, and how many things you know.” The little evidence provided in this response is vague and general rather than concrete.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The style is not vivid or persuasive. The response takes a simplistic approach that does not make evident any complexities of thought and does not employ effective rhetorical choices in developing the argument.